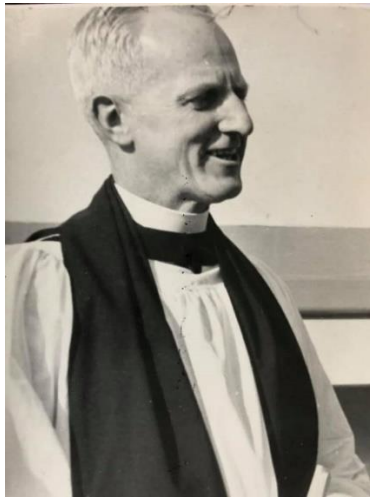


Missions

We continue to support ABM through the Advent envelopes available at the back of the Cathedral.

ABM - The Frank Coaldrake Awards are given out each year to those who have served as a missionary, volunteer or staff member with the ABM. This is the story of that extraordinary priest – a shining light to us all.



Frank Coaldrake around the time he became Chairman of the ABM – 1956 (Image courtesy of the Records and Archives Centre, ACSQ)

From Australia to post-War Japan and back: the extraordinary life of Canon Frank Coaldrake



Frank Coaldrake at a Sunday School Teacher training course – 1948 (Sourced from Japan From War to Peace: The Coaldrake Records 1939-1956 by Bill Coaldrake)

Fifty years ago, in late July 1970, our Diocese received the tragic news that the man they had elected to be their next Archbishop, Canon Frank William Coaldrake (1912-1970), had suffered a sudden haemorrhage and a heart attack, and had passed away at Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney. All in our Diocese, including Archbishop Philip Strong, other clergy and laity, felt the loss of this incredible man of faith. At his funeral, the future Archbishop of Brisbane, Felix Arnott, reflected:

“I have said a lamp must be lit, but the lamp of Frank’s life was surely lit by God. He was convinced of it, for he was a man of deep personal religion and a sense of vocation that communicated itself to all his friends. Like John he was more than a prophet. He was truly a man of God, one who in his preaching and all his work and every department of his life proclaimed the way of the Lord.”

His was an extraordinary life filled with courage and conviction. A life that had its beginnings in Brisbane.

Frank Coaldrake was born in 1912 to a middle-class family. His youth was spent first at a state school and then at Brisbane Grammar School, before he embarked on training as a teacher. Throughout his youth, and his formative years in particular, Coaldrake had met and been fascinated by the Bush Brothers and their outback ministry. This led to him moving to Charleville in 1932 and taking up the post of Warden at the Bush Brotherhood-run boys’ hostel there. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* tells us that:

“There, for four years, despite meagre resources, his enthusiasm, talent for community work and rapport with the young turned the hostel into a hive of purposeful activity.”

It was at Charleville, and particularly in his conversations with Brother Cecil Edwards, as recounted by Felix Arnott at Coaldrake’s funeral, where he became convinced of his vocation, and he set off to begin his university studies in 1936. It was here in Brisbane, residing at St John’s College at the University of Queensland, that Coaldrake’s mission in life really began to take shape. He studied moral philosophy, examined the campaigns of people like Gandhi, and determined that the only truly Christian course was to be a pacifist. This manifested itself at the start of the World War II when, in 1939, he founded the newspaper *The Peacemaker*, a monthly publication to inform and help those men who conscientiously objected to military service. He encouraged conscientious objection to the war, and through his time as a passionate member of the Student Christian Movement, sought to make social justice and peace the central tenets to his faith. He would go on to become the third President of the National Union of Australian University Students.

In 1939, an auspicious year for Frank Coaldrake, he was asked by Father Gerard Tucker to head down to Melbourne and become a part of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Utilising the skills he had gained working in Charleville, he was stationed at Keble House, a hostel for youth experiencing homelessness. He was a tireless advocate for both his charges and broad social justice issues. He organised peaceful protests against the injustices he felt existed in the housing system of Victoria, apparently even parking himself on the steps of the homes of people threatened with eviction by unreasonable landlords and refusing to move.

It was during his time in Melbourne that Coaldrake undertook his theological training and was made a deacon in 1942 and a priest in 1943. For a short time he was precentor of St Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne. It was in 1943 that Coaldrake first approached the Federal Government, specifically the Minister for External Affairs, to ask if he would allow him to go to Japan as a missionary. This extraordinary request, in the middle of World War II, was refused. He was resolute, however, and

finally succeeded in June of 1947 in becoming the first Australia missionary to enter Japan during the post-war period. In the March 1945 issue of *The Peacemaker*, Coaldrake details his philosophy on how to reach out to and engage with the people of Japan.

“It is unrealistic to stand off from a neighbouring people and try to make friends from behind a barricade. It is unrealistic to stand over a conquered enemy and try to beat him into the shape of a friend...We must try and avoid that. The ‘good neighbour’ policy is the realistic one.”

He was supported in this work by the Australian Board of Missions. In August of that year, a delegation organised by the Australian Board of Missions and including Archbishop Reginald Halse of Brisbane, visited Japan to be met by Frank Coaldrake.

Frank Coaldrake’s time in Japan is documented very well by his son, Bill Coaldrake, in the book *Japan From War to Peace: The Coaldrake Records 1939-1956*. A copy of this book can be found in the Reading Room Library at our Records and Archives Centre. Frank Coaldrake set about working to help rebuild the Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan, or *Nippon Seikōkai*, mostly in the Yokohama region, south of Tokyo, but also on the Izu peninsula, a mountainous locale with many remote and isolated villages. It was in this region that he founded St Mary’s Anglican Church.

Coaldrake’s time in Japan was very rewarding for the young priest. He had spent over a year in preparation for his mission, learning the language and the culture, so he was well placed when he arrived to understand those he sought to help. The rewards, however, came at the cost of much hardship. The Japanese people had very little food after the war, and Coaldrake attempted to alleviate that by giving much of his own rations, sent to him from home, to the local people. This, combined with an almost ever-present lack of sleep, helped lead to him being diagnosed with rickets and beriberi only two years after arriving. A furlough to Australia was organised. In a newsletter written on board the ship taking him ‘home’, Coaldrake wrote of his hopes upon returning to Australia:

“The chief thing that hampers us in this is the lack of resources which can only be supplied by the Home Church – men, materials and money. When I am in Australia I am in the one place where it is possible to bring about more interest and practical help from the Home Church. No opportunity to do so must be missed. When there is no opportunity for such work, then we have a holiday, visit friends, seek better health and make preparations for return.”

Around the same time, while in Australia in 1949, Coaldrake and Tasmanian Maida Williams, a church youth worker, married in Christ Church St Laurence, Sydney. In his sermon at Frank Coaldrake’s funeral, at the very same church, Felix Arnott noted his own part in this wedding and in Coaldrake’s life:

“On his furlough from Japan on December 3, 1949, he asked me if I would marry him here on a Saturday morning in this church, and it was a great joy and privilege to do it, with Bishop Cranswick, of Tasmania, later taking the celebration of Holy Communion. By one of those strange accidents of history, I still have in my Prayer Book, and it has been there for a very long time, the Christmas card

which he sent me that announced the arrival of Bill in Japan. It was probably put in as a convenient bookmark and it has never been removed.”

Coaldrake and his family ended up spending close to a decade in Japan. Frank and Maida welcomed two children into their lives while there and lived in everything from a 600-year-old farmhouse to far less comfortable abodes. He earned the love and respect of those he sought to minister to through his own self-sacrifice and his willingness to see the humanity in the Japanese people, a notion not shared by many Australians at the time due to the war-time experiences of POWs in particular. It was perhaps his undoubted success in Japan that led to him being asked to become the Chair of the Anglican Board of Missions (ABM) in 1956. This was too great an opportunity to pass up so, perhaps with a heavy heart, the family left Japan and moved to Sydney for the next stage of their lives.

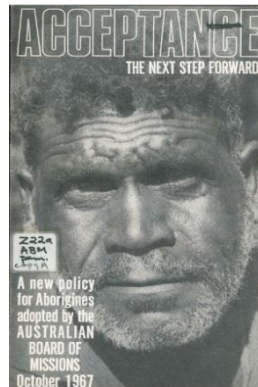
Frank Coaldrake around the time he became Chairman of the ABM – 1956 (Image courtesy of the Records and Archives Centre, ACSQ)



Frank Coaldrake with representatives from the Southern Tokyo Diocese – 1949 (Sourced from *Japan From War to Peace: The Coaldrake Records 1939-1956* by Bill Coaldrake)

For the next 14 years Coaldrake devoted himself to the work of the ABM. This included establishing a ground-breaking shift away from notions of ‘assimilation’ when it came to First Nations peoples, notions which he considered to be racist, toward ‘acceptance’. Indeed, Coaldrake himself wrote the publication *Acceptance: The Next Step Forward. A new policy for Aborigines adopted by the Australian Board of Missions* October 1967, in which he states that:

“Acceptance is what Aborigines [sic] feel they need and acceptance without a demand for alteration and conformity is an idea which the European people in the community will need to accept.”



Cover of Acceptance: The Next Step Forward. A new policy for Aborigines adopted by the Australian Board of Missions October 1967

He also insisted that a First Nations person act as a policy advisor in 1969. By that point Coaldrake was Canon Frank Coaldrake, after the All Souls' Quetta Memorial Cathedral, Thursday Island, had given him that honour. During this period, he also initiated and fostered strong ecumenical relationships among many different Christian denominations, which was unusual in that era, in his roles with the National Missionary Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Churches.

On 10 July 1970 he was elected Archbishop of Brisbane. He would have been the first Brisbane-born, Queensland-born, even Australian-born Archbishop of Brisbane if he hadn't passed away only 12 days later. He suffered an intragastric haemorrhage and died of myocardial infarction on 22 July 1970. His funeral was held at Christ Church St Laurence in Sydney. He was survived by his wife, Maida, and their son and two daughters.

Canon Frank Coaldrake is remembered in many ways. A set of stained-glass windows commemorate him in St John's Cathedral, with the plaque reading:

“This window is dedicated to the memory of Canon Frank William Coaldrake, M.A., Th.L., Priest and Missionary

Born Brisbane 12th March 1912

Elected Archbishop of Brisbane

10th July 1970

Died Sydney, 22nd July, 1970.”

Every year a scholarship is awarded from the Frank Coaldrake Memorial Fund to the University of Sydney to support any post-graduate research students engaging in Japanese Studies or any other East Asian Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. And in 2017 the ABM honoured him with the ABM Frank Coaldrake Award, given out each year to those who have served as a missionary, volunteer or staff member with the ABM.

Perhaps the final words on the contribution of Frank Coaldrake should be left to the man who was his dear friend, and who eventually was elected to take the office that Coaldrake would have taken as Archbishop of Brisbane, Felix Arnott:

“The early morning belongs to the Church of the Risen Christ. At the break of the day the Church remembers the morning on which death and sin lay prostrate in defeat and new life and salvation were given to mankind. In that same faith, on this lovely morning, and in the early mornings to come, we will remember Frank Coaldrake, and thank God that in him he gave us a shining light.”

This is the article from:

Anglican Focus - The news site of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland:

If you would like to view the entire article, please visit:

<https://anglicanfocus.org.au/2020/12/04/from-australia-to-post-war-japan-and-back-the-extraordinary-life-of-canon-frank-coaldrake/>